

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 247 001

PS 014 405

AUTHOR Larsen, Jean M.; Draper, Thomas W.
TITLE Does Preschool Help the Educationally Advantaged Child? Preliminary Findings from a Longitudinal Study.
PUB DATE Apr 84
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (68th, New Orleans, LA, April 23-27, 1984).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Advantaged; Comparative Analysis; Early Childhood Education; *Interpersonal Competence; *Kindergarten Children; *Outcomes of Education; *Preschool Children; *Preschool Education; Preschool Evaluation; Rating Scales; Sex Differences; Social Development
IDENTIFIERS California Preschool Social Competency Scale

ABSTRACT

Part of a 10-year project that will follow five waves of educationally advantaged children from preschool through the fourth grade, this study examined the immediate effects of attending preschool on social competence. Once in the year prior to kindergarten entry and again near the conclusion of kindergarten, trained testers completed the California Preschool Competency Scale for all 104 subjects during two half-hour observations of the subjects in a group setting. Seventy-three of the children had attended a university preschool for at least two semesters prior to attending kindergarten. The control group had been applicants for the same preschool but had not been chosen to attend by a random selection process. Children who attended preschool were rated as more socially competent than those who did not. In addition, children were rated as more socially competent at the end of kindergarten than prior to attending. There was evidence that preschool attendance is of particular value in developing the social skills of young boys. Finally, it was suggested that further study and aggregation of new waves of data will be needed to determine how enduring the influences of preschool experience are in the lives of educationally advantaged children. (Author/CB)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED247001

PS 014405

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official NIE
position or policy.

Does Preschool Help the Educationally Advantaged Child?

Preliminary Findings From A Longitudinal Study

Jean M. Larsen, Ph.D.

and

Thomas W. Draper, Ph.D.

Early Childhood Education

Department of Family Sciences

Brigham Young University

Provo, Utah

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Jean M.

Larsen

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Running Head: DOES PRESCHOOL HELP THE EDUCATIONALLY ADVANTAGED CHILD?

Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association 1984
Annual Meeting, New Orleans, Louisiana, April 25, 1984. Requests for
copies should be sent to Dr. Jean M. Larsen, ECE Program Coordinator and
Research Project Director, 1319-A SFLC, Brigham Young University, Provo,
Utah, 84602.

Abstract

Longitudinal data consisting of scores from the California Preschool Social Competency Scale for 104 children were examined in the year prior to the children entering kindergarten and again near the conclusion of kindergarten. Seventy-three of the children had received at least two semesters of preschool prior to attending kindergarten. The remaining 31 children had been applicants for the same preschool experience but had not been chosen to attend by a random selection process. These children had received no other preschool experience and served as a control group in a study of the immediate and long-term influences of a preschool experience on educationally advantaged children. The median education of the children's mothers was 16 years and fathers 18 years. Children who attended preschool were rated as more socially competent than those who did not. Children were rated as more socially competent at the end of kindergarten than prior to attending. There was evidence that preschool attendance is of particular value in developing the social skills of young boys.

Does Preschool Help the Educationally Advantaged Child?

Preliminary Findings From A Longitudinal Study

During the past two decades there has been considerable interest in the effects of preschool on young children and their families. Most of the research concerning preschoolers has been directed toward disadvantaged or deprived children who have been involved in group learning settings such as Head Start, a compensatory early education program. A number of these studies have demonstrated that participation in a quality preschool program has had positive lasting effects (Lazar, Darlington, Murray, Royce and Shipper, 1982; Schweinhart & Weihart, 1980).

Research using preschool children from advantaged or middle socioeconomic families as subjects has been conducted less frequently. The studies in this group have either compared the influences of different types of preschool programs or tested specific hypotheses from developmental theories (Zimaes & Silk, 1968; Beller, 1967; Guidubadi, Bersani, Kehle & Sexton, 1974; Chatlin-McNichols, 1981; Cataldo & Salzer, 1982).

There has been little research on the general influences of a formal preschool program on children from homes likely to provide them with high levels of social and intellectual stimulation. Indeed, the tacit assumption of the deficit hypothesis, so commonly used in studies of disadvantaged children, is that non-disadvantaged children are likely to receive adequate stimulation at home and thereby experience only minimal benefits from preschool. Yet, others have reasoned that most children, whether formally classified as "disadvantaged" or not, are

under-stimulated (Hunt, 1961; Bloom, 1964). Accordingly, all children should be able to gain from a preschool environment that has been carefully constructed to meet their needs.

In addition to determining who benefits from early education settings, other questions that need to be answered have to do with precisely when and how much or what types of experiences are most conducive to various aspects of development and learning. While there may be general agreement that proper environmental stimulation enhances the cognitive, physical, and personality development of the child there is some disagreement as to the appropriate focus or concentration of learning experiences, as well as how and when the influences of a good environment affect children. Indeed we may ponder whether a group experience prior to kindergarten is really necessary for children who have been fortunate enough to be born into a stimulating and/or enriching family home setting.

Although much attention was placed on raising I.Q. for young children participating in the compensatory education movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Zigler, 1978), social competency has been recognized by a number as the most important outcome (Zigler 1970; Clarke & Clarke, 1976; Ginsburg, 1972; Zigler, 1978). Nevertheless, researchers have encountered more obstacles investigating social functioning than I.Q. because of difficulty in adequately defining and measuring the social dimension.

Zigler (1973) has defined social competence broadly as an individual's everyday effectiveness in dealing with his environment, while Anderson and Messick (1974) specified 29 facets of competency in

their more complete definition. After reviewing numerous subsequent definitions and assessment strategies, Zigler (1978) suggested a two-fold approach to measuring social competency. He concluded that measures of social competence should reflect the success of the individual in meeting societal expectancies and indicate something about the self-actualization or personal development of the human being.

Assuming that the social domain encompasses more of an individual's ability or effectiveness in dealing with his/her total environment than can be expected from cognitive functioning alone, then the development or enhancement of social, rather than intellectual competence may be the most worthy primary goal for all children in the early years.

In an effort to determine if preschool attendance has positive affects on educationally advantaged children similar to those that have been reported for deprived or disadvantaged children, a longitudinal study was begun in 1981 at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. Ultimately, five waves of children (each wave is composed of an experimental group who attend the BYU preschool and a control group who do not attend) and their parents will be followed from preschool through the fourth grade of elementary school in this ten-year project. At spaced intervals, data related to children's social, intellectual and physical/motor development are being collected.

The purpose of this paper is to report the findings of the beginning phases of the longitudinal study. This portion of the project was designed to study the effects of participation in a preschool program which promotes social enhancement of educationally advantaged children. The data presented are limited to measures of social competency for the

first study wave of young children during their preschool and kindergarten years.

Method

Subjects

The children sample for the present project was composed of the experimental and the control groups of the first subject wave in the BYU preschool longitudinal study. Children who were randomly selected from a large pool of applicants, who had attended the campus preschool for a minimum of two semesters, and who were eligible for kindergarten the beginning of the following school year composed the experimental group. The control group was comprised of applicants eligible for kindergarten the following year who were not selected by the random draw for the campus preschool and whose parents gave permission for their participation in the study. The control group was restricted to only those applicants who had not attended preschools or group child care programs prior to their entering kindergarten. The number of subjects in this wave was, 87 Experimental (40 males and 47 females) and 42 Control (20 males and 22 females).

All children in the study were deemed education- and achievement-oriented due to several factors: living with both parents; the large proportion of full-time mothers, only 7 percent of the mothers in the sample were employed; the high education level of both parents, median years of school for mothers was 16 years and 18 years for fathers; and the occupational level as well as the income of the employed parents being well above average for the Rocky Mountain region of the country (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980), with 59 percent of

fathers in professional occupations in addition to 24 percent in semiprofessional occupations and only 15 percent indicating an income of \$15,000 or less.

In addition to other demographics unique to the sample, the large majority of the families applying to the BYU preschool program maintain a very active religious affiliation (Mormon) that emphasizes child-centered family activities. It should be noted that Mormon parents have been shown to have achievement expectations for their children that are similar to those of other achievement-oriented parents (Dewey & McKinney, 1976).

It was speculated that the educational and financial advantages enjoyed by families of these children, as well as the religious emphasis, should work against the experimental design and make it less likely that preschool effects, over and above the effects of a good home environment, will be observed.

Preschool Program

The BYU preschool program could best be described as traditional and eclectic with teacher training as one of its primary functions. A balance of activities are offered for children which include free selection of indoor and outdoor materials for discovery learning and play; group discussions and learning activities to develop basic concepts about the world we live in; and opportunity for creative expression through music, movement, language and art. In these ways the program would be fairly typical of university-run preschool programs.

There is one way in which the BYU preschool program is different from the majority of university-run preschool programs. All parents who

have children enrolled in the BYU preschool agree to participate in a weekly parent education program sponsored by the early childhood education faculty. The content of this program could also be described as traditional and eclectic. Parents may choose from five different methods of participation in parent education: (a) attend classes, (b) listen to dramatized cassette recordings, (c) have home visits by undergraduate parent education instructors who are majoring in early childhood education, (d) read parent education materials, and (e) participate with the teachers and children in the preschool laboratory.

Data Collection

The California Preschool Social Competency Scale (CPSCS: Levine, 1969), an observational measure of the child's social skills, was the primary assessment tool used in this study. The scale was completed by trained testers during a two and one-half hour observation of subjects in a group setting. To facilitate the testing in phase one (preschool) of the project, children in the control group attended a special two-week preschool session on the BYU campus. The experiences provided in this special session were basically free selection and play oriented.

For the phase two testing, a year after the first data collection, the CPSCS was administered in kindergarten. One item that was judged inappropriate for kindergarten children was replaced in the CPSCS and the measure was referred to as the KCPSCS for the second testing phase. Data for both preschool and kindergarten was collected during a 15-day period six weeks prior to the end of the school year. In addition to the standardized test data from each child, family demographic data and

data about the time and kinds of activities that both parents participated in with the target child were gathered via a parent questionnaire.

Results and Discussion

Data were available from both the preschool and kindergarten assessments for 73 of the 87 children in the experimental group and 31 of the 42 children in the control group. A 2 (group) $\times$ 2 (sex) $\times$ 2 (age: repeated measure) analysis of variance was conducted using the General Linear Models program from the SAS statistical analysis package (Goodnight, Sall & Sarle, 1982). This procedure is particularly useful where repeated measures and unequal cell sizes exist. It provides conservative Type III sum of square estimates.

There were main effects for group ($F = 4.89$; $df = 1, 100$; $p < .05$) and age ($F = 19.66$; $df = 1, 100$; $p < .05$). There was one marginal interaction between group and sex ($F = 2.88$; $df = 1, 100$; $p < .10$). No other main effects or interactions were noted ($p > .10$). Children who attended preschool ($\bar{X} = 95.4$) were rated as more socially competent than those who did not ($\bar{X} = 90.9$). Kindergarten children ($\bar{X} = 97.5$) were rated more socially competent than preschool children ($\bar{X} = 90.6$). The marginal interaction was due to the lower ratings given boys who had not attended preschool ($\bar{X} = 86.4$) as compared to boys who had attended ($\bar{X} = 94.9$), girls who had attended ($\bar{X} = 95.7$), and girls who had not attended ($\bar{X} = 94.2$).

These findings indicate that a preschool experience can contribute to the development of social skills even among children whose parents are likely to provide them with intellectual and social stimulation. A

preschool experience may be of particular importance in helping young boys to develop socially. The mean difference between the experimental and control groups that was present at the end of preschool (6.4 points) was less after all children had received a year of kindergarten (2.6 points). Control group children had made up much of the difference but not all. In kindergarten, ratings of social competence for girls who had not attended preschool paralleled those of both boys and girls who had attended preschool. This was not the case for boys.

Further study and aggregation of new waves of data will be needed to determine just how enduring the influences of a preschool experience are in the lives of educationally advantaged children. As each additional phase of the longitudinal study is completed, greater clarification of the role of preschool in the development of advantaged children will be obtained.

References

- Anderson, S. & Messick, S. (1974). Social competency in young children. Developmental Psychology, 10, 282-283.
- Beller, E. K. (1967). A study of cognition and social functioning. ERIC, 025 310. U.S. Department of HEW, Office of Economic Opportunity.
- Bloom, B. (1964). Stability and change in human characteristics. New York: Wiley.
- Cataldo, C. S., & Salzer, R. T. (1982). Early childhood program benefits and middle-class families. Child Study Journal, 12, 45-56.
- Chattin-McNichols, J. P. (1981). The effects of Montessori school experience. Young Children, 36, 49-66.
- Clarke, A. M., & Clarke, A. D. B. (Eds.). (1976). Early experiences: Myth and evidence. London: Open Books.
- Dewey, T., & McKinney, D. (1976). Independence training as an index of achievement motivation: A study of LDS families. Unpublished paper, Harvard University.
- Ginsburg, H. (1972). The myth of the deprived child: Poor children's intellect and education. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
- Goodnight, J. H., Sall, J. P., & Sarle, W. S. (1982). GLM. In SAS user's guide: Statistics (1982 ed.). Raleigh, NC: SAS Institute Inc.
- Guidubaldi, J., Bersani, C.A., Kehle, T.J., & Sexton, S.E. (1974). Effectiveness of preschool programs as a function of children's

- socioeconomic status. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 090 273).
- Hunt, J. McV. (1961). Intelligence and experience. New York: Ronald.
- Lazar, I., Darlington, R., Murray, H., Royce, J. & Snipper, A. (1982). Lasting effects of early education: A report from the consortium for longitudinal studies. Monograph of the Society for Research in Child Development, 47, (2-3, Serial No. 195).
- Levine, S., Elzey, F., Lewis, M. (1969). California preschool social competency scale. Palo Alto: Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc.
- Schweinhart, L., & Weihart, D. (1980). Young children grow up: The effects of the Perry Preschool Program on youths through age 15. Monograph of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 7.
- U.S. Bureau of the Census, Statistical abstract of the United States: 1980 (101st edition). Washington, D.C., 1980.
- Zimiles, H. & Silk, B. (1968). Comparative item-content analysis achievement test performance in young children. Office of Economic Opportunity, Washington, D.C.
- Zigler, E. (1973). Head Start: Success or failure? Learning, 1, 43-47.
- Zigler, E. & Trichett, P. K. (1978). IQ, social competence, and evaluation of early childhood intervention programs. American Psychologist, 33, 789-798.
- Zigler, E. (1970). The environmental mystique: Training the intellect versus development of the child. Childhood Education, 46, 402-412.